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**Pension Fund
Pot of Gold?**

**Telecommunications
On the Horizon**

**Grounds Upkeep:
Cost-Saving Ideas**

Financial Headaches
Dominate Survey



AMERICAN CITY & COUNTY®

November 1987

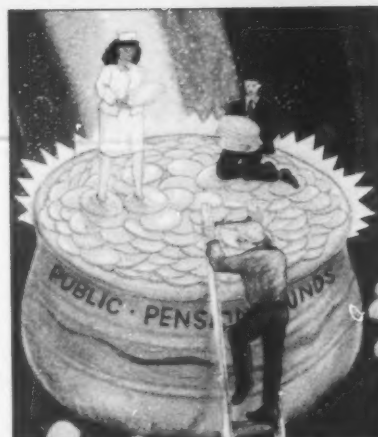
Vol. 102, No. 11

COVER STORY

32 Financial Headaches

Photo by Sam Turner, Atlanta; Piggy bank courtesy of Chelita Freeman, Hapeville, Ga.

This year's Survey of Issues & Trends reveals local governments are still struggling to find ways to maintain existing infrastructure while building new facilities.



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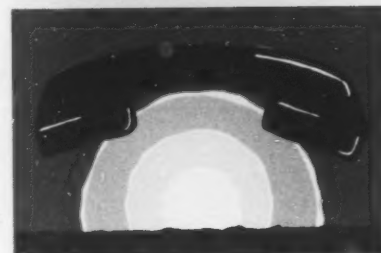


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● Distribution and continued funding of existing federal infrastructure trust funds. Horsley cites \$15 billion in reserves, particularly in highway and airport trust funds, now being held.

● Elimination of federal restrictions on the use of tax-exempt financing for infrastructure needs.

● Creation of a federal capital infrastructure program to provide assistance to states and localities in meeting infrastructure needs.

● Establishment of a federal, long-term multi-year capital budget.

Along with NACo, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and NLC, the coalition includes: American Consulting Engineers Council, American Institute of Architects, American Public Works Association, American Society of Civil Engineers, Associated General Contractors of America, National Association of Home Builders, National Conference of State Legislators, National Governors Association and Public Securities Association.

— Ellen Perlman

Recreation Delegates Meet in New Orleans

Even though "Life, Leisure and All That Jazz" was the theme for the National Recreation and Parks Association's Congress in New Orleans, the emphasis quickly shifted to doing more with less in this era of budget cuts.

More than 5,000 delegates attended the annual event in September, with more than 200 educational sessions to choose from. Seminar topics ranged from funding priorities among local programs and a selective legislative agenda to using wildflowers in public parks to make the scenery more colorful. More than 600 exhibitors displayed their products in Louisiana Superdome.

"We need a higher level of dependability among our budget planners," according to Ney Landrum, director of the Division of Recreation and Parks for the Department of Natural Resources in Tallahassee, Fla. "When it comes to maintaining outdoor recreational facilities, the stability of the funding source is just as important as the amount of funding."

Establishing revenue sources for park rehabilitation also was discussed. Mike Ensich from the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors told delegates, "There are a variety of funding sources available for this purpose. These include land-development fees, visitor fees and user-pay programs. However, taxes provide most of the money for this area."

Several key bills are slated for debate in the 100th U.S. Congress, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) appropriations, which provides 50/50 matching federal funds to

SURVEY SPOTLIGHT

Study Released On Privatization

Privatization, an increasingly popular local-government buzzword, was the subject of a recent study conducted by the accounting firm Touche Ross. According to Irwin T. David, national director of public-sector services for the firm, use of privatization — where private companies provide traditionally government-run services and facilities — is fairly widespread among U.S. cities and counties.

Nonetheless, statistics describing the extent to which privatization actually is practiced as an alternative method of public-service delivery were not readily available. So Touche Ross conducted a survey attempting to measure city and county use of privatization, and released the results of its study in a report entitled "Privatization in America."

Co-sponsored by the Privatization Council and the International City Management Association, the report is based on a survey of public officials of cities and counties with populations of more than 5,000 and 25,000, respectively. Questionnaires were distributed last July and 19 percent, or 1,086 government officials, responded.

Of all those participating in the survey, nearly 80 percent say they have used or expect to use some form of privatization in the future. Almost all of the governments that have used privatization in any form have used it for contracting services out to the private sector. The services most frequently contracted out in the last five years have been solid-waste collection or disposal (nearly 60 percent), vehicle towing or storage (45 percent), and building or grounds maintenance and service (nearly 45 percent).

About one-third of the governments that have utilized privatization in any form have privatized facilities, including sewage-treatment plants and solid-waste or resource-recovery facilities, and nearly 40 percent indicate they plan to do this during the next two years.

In addition, nearly 25 percent say they have already sold government assets to the private sector, but only 21 percent plan to sell them during the next two years. Of those that

have sold assets, nearly 70 percent have sold vacant land, presumably for development by private-sector developers, the study reports.

Respondents also indicate savings of operating and capital costs, as well as solutions to inadequate gov-

Which types of privatization does your government plan to use in the next two years?

Contracting services out



Privatizing facilities



Asset sales

21%

ernmental staff and facilities, were their primary reasons for turning to the private sector in the above areas.

Impediments to privatization, regardless of which form, were most often cited as loss of control, politics, and a lack of belief in the benefits of privatization. Union or employee resistance was ranked as a more important impediment to contracting services out than to privatizing facilities or asset sales.

"Privatization is not a panacea, but a technique to be used when appropriate," says David. "Regarding it as one of several ways to provide the services their citizens want and need, (local officials) examine it carefully alongside other methods, service by service." He says the most critical conclusion of the survey is, "There is still an urgent need to educate citizens and policymakers on alternative methods to provide services to taxpayers."

The majority of respondents say demand for services (65 percent) and taxpayer resistance to tax increases (59 percent) have increased their interest in privatization.

Local governments most frequently choose established organizations that have provided the same or similar service to other governmental units for privatization projects. They most often select the private organization on the basis of the lowest or most competitive bid. Copies of "Privatization in America" are available from Irwin T. David, Touche Ross, 1900 M St., N.W., Washington D.C. 20036.

— Karen Kutz



AC&C
Survey

Financial Headaches

This year's "Survey of Issues and Trends" reveals local governments are still struggling to find ways to maintain existing infrastructure while building new facilities.

By Ken Anderberg, Editor

Illustration by Brian Buxton

Sionx City, Iowa, needs a new city hall. Built nearly 100 years ago, the existing building is plagued with the kinds of plumbing, heating and air-conditioning problems associated with an older structure. The facility "does not function effectively," says City Manager Alan Harvey, but the city has no plans to build a new one.

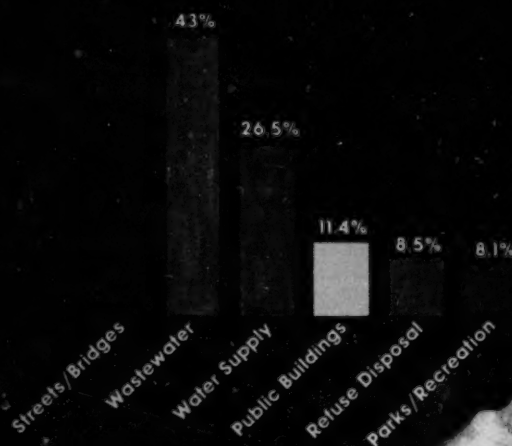
This middle-America community of 82,000 people, which sits alongside the Missouri River opposite the shores of Nebraska, is typical of the plight of America's cities and counties. New facilities are needed badly and the price tag goes up every year, but when there is not even enough money for maintenance and repair, new projects are put on hold. The result often is a financial headache with ever-fewer remedies.

Harvey is one of 211 city and county officials who responded to *American City & County's* annual "Survey of Issues and Trends." Every region of the country is represented in the study, with 84 percent of the polled communities having populations of less than 100,000 people. Ten cities and counties with populations greater than 500,000 responded. Survey participants were asked 17 questions related to infrastructure needs, financial concerns and purchasing plans.

Sionx City's Harvey was among the 37 percent of respondents who rated their need for infrastructure re-

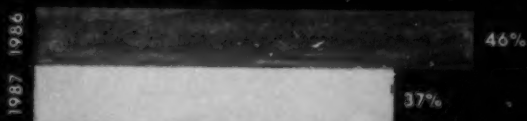
Which facilities are most in need of repair?

62%



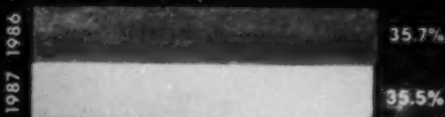
Rate your need for repair of infrastructure facilities.

Serious/Very Serious



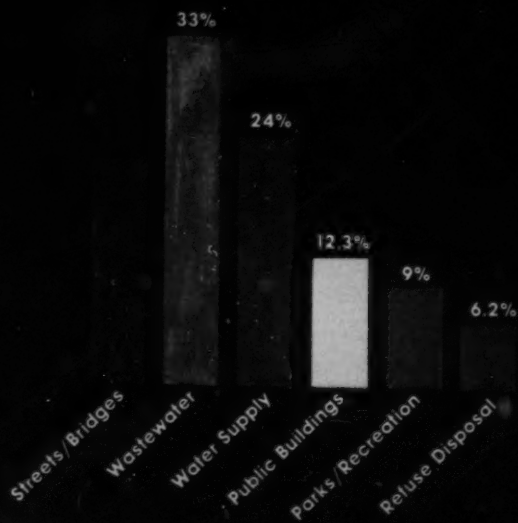
Rate your need for new infrastructure facilities.

Serious/Very Serious



What new facilities are needed?

40.3%



pair as serious. Another 52 percent said their repair needs were normal or moderate, while slightly more than one in 10 rated their facilities in good condition. In contrast, 46 percent of respondents in last year's survey said they had a serious maintenance problem, and only 8 percent called their infrastructure in good condition.

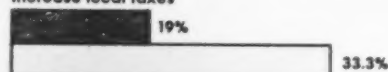
The cost for that repair is going up, however. In 1986, 45 percent of those polled listed the price tag for needed work at more than \$5 million, with 13 percent saying the cost would exceed \$20 million. This year, those figures have climbed to 49 percent and 14 percent, respectively.

According to the survey, streets and bridges, and wastewater-collection and treatment facilities head the priority list for repairs. Nearly two out of three respondents cited maintenance of streets and bridges as a priority, while two of five mentioned wastewater systems. Maintenance of water-distribution and treatment networks is a concern of more than 26 percent of those polled, while government buildings were mentioned by 11 percent.

Bill Wood, public works director for Pascagoula, Miss., calls his city's wastewater-collection system "a perpetual millstone around our necks. It's getting old and falling in. There's a lot of infiltration."

What will be your first response to reduced federal funds?

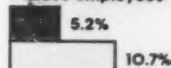
Increase local taxes



Reduce services



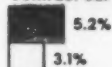
Reduce employees



Increase/implement user fees



Contract out



But Pascagoula's 30,000 residents are not inclined to approve funding for repair, Wood says. "The city doesn't have the money to do anything," he says. "The only real possibility is a bond issue and the taxpayers have consistently voted down bond issues. They've even vetoed school bonds."

Wood adds the city also is in need of

an improved water-supply system since local well water is of poor quality and does not meet federal standards.

Madison Heights, Mich., currently is repairing three of the four major roads in the city, says Peter Connors, public works director. "Two are getting an asphalt overlay and another is being expanded to five lanes," he says. The

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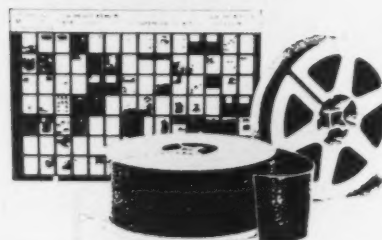
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work is being financed through a special-assessment district fee on local roads.

John Reale, water and wastewater superintendent for Rantoul Village, Ill., says his city "just completed an \$18 million sewer-system expansion. The project took 2½ years to complete, and it will more than double our capacity." Reals says the construction cost of the program was financed through a 20 percent rate increase in the city's wastewater services and a 12 percent rate increase in water services.

"We've been addressing our infrastructure issues for the last three years," says Peter Naum, Bedford, Mass., finance director. "We need to expand our well capacity since we import most of our water now. Water and sewer are financial concerns. We're either going to spend to import or to provide our own."

Regionally, communities in the Southeast and Midwest/North Central states have the highest percentage of repair needs, with the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic the lowest. Street and bridge rehabilitation is mentioned by two of three respondents in the Midwest/North Central region, with sewer and wastewater-treatment maintenance rated highest in the Southeast (48 percent). The Southeast also has the greatest water main and waterworks repair needs (35.5 percent), and park-maintenance revitalization requirements (22.6 percent). Land-short states in the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic rated their refuse-disposal needs highest, regionally, at 13 percent.

Rehabilitation costs are listed lowest in the Midwest/North Central area (34 percent over \$5 million), and highest in the Southwest/West (63 percent over \$5 million).

Unlike infrastructure repair, the need to construct new facilities has not slowed since last year. Slightly more than one of every three communities surveyed say their new facility requirements are serious, the same as in 1986. The difference this year is in the cost for providing those facilities. Last year, about 42 percent said the price tag for needed projects exceeded \$5 million. This year, half the communities polled listed \$5 million and above. Fourteen percent will require more than \$20 million for new facilities; last year that figure was 11 percent.

Again, street and bridge construction top the priority list with two of five respondents saying they need new facilities. Next were wastewater systems at 33 percent and water supply at 24 percent. Twice as many communities as last year cited a need for new parks.

Bernard Davis, Galveston, Texas, parks and recreation director, says new streets and public buildings are the main concern for his community. "The budget was just approved," he says, "and we have a good contingency fund for street improvements — \$722,000." Galveston's needs are serious in both repair and new facility categories, says Davis, with \$5 million to \$10 million required for both.

Maryville, Mo., has a permanent street program, according to waterworks and wastewater-treatment superintendent W.D. Driskell. "Every year, 10 to 12 blocks of streets are added." Still, Driskell lists new streets as a priority, along with sewers and water mains. He rates the city's needs as moderate in these areas.

New construction receives the highest survey priority in the Southeast, where 48 percent cite a serious problem, particularly in the area of wastewater col-

lection and treatment. More than half the cities and counties responding from the Southeast say the price tag for new construction will exceed \$5 million. New streets and bridges are needed most in the Midwest/North Central (46 percent) and Southwest/West (43 percent); more than one-third must construct wastewater facilities in the Midwest/North Central; new water-supply systems are sought by more than 27 percent in the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic; and new public buildings are needed most in the Southwest/West (12 percent) and Midwest/North Central (11 percent).

Albemarle, N.C., currently is building a \$7-million, 6-million-gallon water-treatment plant, says Garey Edwards, city engineer. The project is being funded with municipal bonds.

Costs are going up but financial remedies are dwindling, according to the survey. Last year, officials said they were relying on new taxes and user fees to raise new revenue, while also reducing services and employees. This year, user fees are expected to shoulder a heavier burden as many communities have done all the tax raising, employee cutting and service reducing possible.

More than one-third of the respondents say they will implement or increase user fees as a result of reduced federal financial assistance, up 16 percent since last year. In sharp contrast, eliminating jobs is a choice of only 5 percent this year (compared with 11 percent in 1986); reduced services is the choice of 25 percent fewer communities this year; and new or higher taxes is preferred by 19 percent in the current survey as opposed to 33 percent a year ago.

The Pascagoula "Street Division will take some substantial cuts," says Wood. "And the Police Department will be cut down some. We'll also have to reduce our grass cutting."

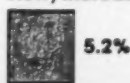
The city's most pressing problem is a "shortage of money," he adds. "The way the feds have squeezed the states and the states are squeezing the cities, we have no one to turn to except the taxpayers."

Galveston already has cut 28 full-time employees, by seniority, reports Davis. Mayor Maureen O'Connor of San Diego says her city will reduce services as its first option, starting with administration. Connors says Madison Heights is leaning to user fees, while Harvey of Sioux City says his community has not increased user fees as yet. And Albemarle has already increased user fees by 5 percent to pay off revenue bonds.

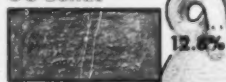
Bedford "tries to avoid borrowing," Naum says. "We rely a lot on user fees, particularly in the water and sewer area. We have built financial models on water and sewer rates, which incorporate all cost factors with a certain amount of

What financing tool do you find most useful for funding new projects?

New/Increased taxes



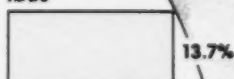
GO Bonds



CDBs



IDBs



* Percent of communities surveyed. Base = 211.

flexibility, including expansion of the system and maintenance. We have had no negative reaction to 30 to 40 percent rate increases.

"This town has a great deal of foresight and if a service is legitimate, then we will fund it," he adds. "We would not eliminate existing services."

Other survey highlights include:

● More than 63 percent say public-works activities will be the first services affected by any loss of federal funds, down from last year's 71.6 percent. Less than half as many communities this year would cut into police and fire services as in 1986.

● About half of those polled say their preferred choice for residential waste disposal is public or private landfills, down by 10 percentage points from last year. Resource recovery did not gain as a disposal option, however, indicating many communities are undecided about their course of action.

● General-obligation bonds are considered the most useful financing tool by 40 percent of respondents, but the usefulness of community-development block grants declined from 21.5 percent last year to 13.7 percent in this year's poll. The decrease parallels sharp budget reductions in this federal program.

● Half of the cities and counties surveyed say they plan to begin using computers and word processors in their ad-

In which departments will you begin using office automation equipment?

Administration



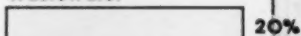
Public Works



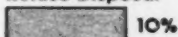
Streets



Wastewater



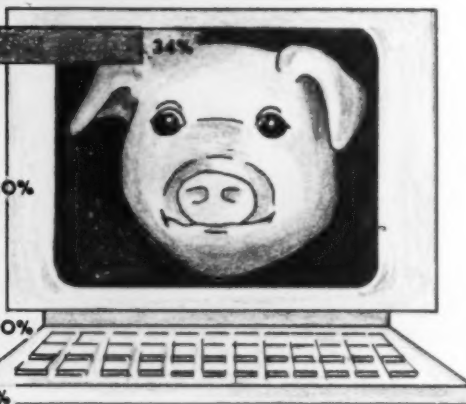
Refuse Disposal



Water Supply



Parks/Recreation



ministrative operations in the coming year. One of three public-works departments will see increased automation, and 20 percent of water and wastewater departments plan to begin using high-tech equipment.

Jim Nightengale, waterworks superintendent for Keizer, Ore., says "We are in the process of purchasing a new

computer system to handle our water and sewer billing." The system will cost \$80,000, and when in operation will enable the city to discontinue data-processing contracting services. □

Additional research was provided by Tim Darnell, assistant editor, and Venè Franco, editorial assistant.

CHICAGO UPDATE!

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MUNICIPAL COST INDEXES

All four indexes registered small increases over last month's readings, with the **Consumer Price Index** showing the most gain. This month's figure of 342.7 indicated a 0.5-percent increase from October's 340.8. The **Municipal Cost Index** reading of 351.8 marks a 0.3-percent rise from October; it has been more than a year since the index dropped. The **Construction Cost Index** rose 0.2 percent, to 387.9, while the **Producer Price Index** showed the least

gain, 0.1 percent to 310.5. This index, though, also demonstrated the most gain from November 1986, an increase of 4.5 percent.

Cable wire rose 3.4 percent from last month, while wiring devices read 386.6 for November. Switchgear dropped 0.2 percent from last month. Metal fabrications registered at 321.4, and generator sets increased 0.1 percent.

— *Compiled by Tim Darnell*

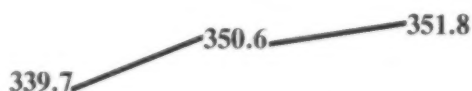
THIS MONTH'S MARKETBASKET

	Current Index	Percent Change From:	
		Last Month	Last Year
Air Conditioners	150.1	0.3	0.6
Apparel	188.0	-0.3	1.7
Asphalt Roofing	370.0	2.1	-4.5
Chemicals, Industrial	335.9	-1.7	6.5
Coal	515.4	-0.3	-4.3
Concrete Products	326.3	0.1	0.4
Construction Machinery	375.5	0.2	2.3
Diesel Fuel	474.7	6.1	56.3
Electric Components	203.7	-0.1	0.5
Electric Lamps	353.3	1.7	1.5
Electric Power	465.5	-0.2	-0.3
Engines, I.C.	359.9	0.1	1.5
Fans, Blowers	371.7	0.3	1.6
Fertilizers, Mixed	257.4	0.5	2.1
Floor Coverings	200.5	0.8	2.2
Flow Instruments	241.1	0.1	1.8
Footwear	270.3	0.7	3.3
Foundry Products	365.3	0.4	0.9
Fuel Oil No. 2	494.1	4.2	39.8
Furniture	327.3	0.2	2.9
Gasoline	429.5	3.5	38.2
Generator Sets	357.3	0.1	1.2
Glass	238.3	-0.3	2.5
Glass Containers	402.3	0	0
Gypsum Products	308.6	-2.6	-10.2
Hardware	307.1	0.1	0.1
Heating Equipment	274.4	-0.3	1.9
HVAC Controls	131.3	-0.1	-0.2
LP Gas	370.7	2.9	24.4
Lubricants	345.0	-0.2	-5.6
Lumber	335.0	0.1	7.5
Metal Fabrications	321.4	0.7	1.7
Millwork	332.0	0.2	3.2
Motor Vehicle Parts	367.1	0	2.6
Mowers	267.7	0.2	1.1
Natural Gas	1069.0	-2.6	-5.6
Office Machines	159.0	0.1	2.9
Paint	334.6	0.5	6.7
Paper	319.5	0.5	3.9
Passenger Cars	234.7	-2.1	1.5
Plumbing Fixtures	333.8	0.3	3.4
Plywood	238.6	2.5	1.5
Portland Cement	346.6	-0.1	-1.0
Residual Fuel	721.6	4.8	99.9
Sand, Gravel	329.6	-0.1	3.2
Sanitary Papers	386.2	0.4	-0.7
Soaps, Detergents	277.8	0.2	2.3
Sporting Goods	210.4	0.5	1.4
Steel Mill Products	355.0	0.2	1.6
Struc. Clay Products	319.4	0.8	2.9
Switchgear	290.7	-0.2	1.8
Tires, Tubes	232.4	0.1	-0.3
Transformers	240.2	1.9	2.5
Trucks	344.9	-0.1	-0.9
Valves	107.9	0.3	0.8
Wire, Cable	217.6	3.4	5.9
Wiring Devices	386.6	0.8	3.2

At-A-Glance Changes

MUNICIPAL COST INDEX

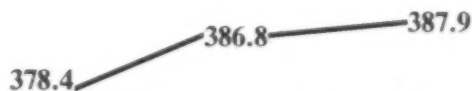
Last Year Last Month This Month



Percent Change From Last: Month 0.3 Year 3.6

CONSTRUCTION COST INDEX

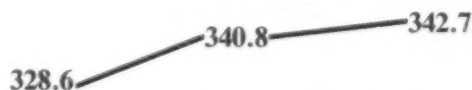
Last Year Last Month This Month



Percent Change From Last: Month 0.2 Year 2.5

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX (BLS)

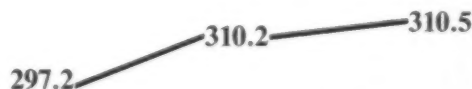
Last Year Last Month This Month



Percent Change From Last: Month 0.5 Year 4.3

PRODUCER PRICE INDEX (BLS)

Last Year Last Month This Month



Percent Change From Last: Month 0.1 Year 4.5

These figures are calculated on a base year of 1967.

QUARTERLY MUNICIPAL TRENDS

	Current Level	Percent Change From:	
		Last Qtr.	Last Year
Receipts	634.8B	.9	7.8
Federal Grants	104.1B	6.6	-10.9
Durable Purchases	23.6B	3.1	9.8
Consumables	37.6B	2.7	-6.0
Services	387.4B	2.3	8.0
Structures	64.6B	-2.7	16.2
Salaries, Wages	309.8B	2.3	6.0
Surplus	59.4B	-7.7	1.0
Employment	13.999M	-.4	2.7